

NSC Review Completed.

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MEMORANDUM

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THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTONTOP SECRETACTION

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

FROM: WILLIAM P. CLARK

SUBJECT: An Iranian Invasion of Iraq:
Considerations for US Policy

It appears that Iran will invade Iraq in the next few days. An invasion will create shock waves throughout the Gulf and pose further dangers for US interests in the Middle East, which are already threatened because of Lebanon. This memorandum summarizes the situation, reviews US interests and objectives, and outlines contingency measures which require your approval as we prepare to deal with the Iranian threat.

The Current Situation

The Iranians have made the necessary preparations to launch an invasion of southwestern Iraq. While attacks may occur at other points along the border, the Iranians are massing 100,000 troops opposite Basra, and their initial goal appears to be the destruction of the Iraqi army and the capture of Basra. The attainment of these objectives, coupled with the fomenting of Shia and Kurdish unrest, could succeed in bringing down the regime of Sadaam Hussein. In these circumstances, Iranian forces will sit astride Kuwait, leaving the Kuwaitis very vulnerable to direct or indirect Iranian threats. The Saudis, Jordanians, and Gulf states will be extremely alarmed, and can be expected to turn to us for protection. Faced with direct threats on their own territory, Iraqi forces may be invigorated and succeed in resisting Iran's invasion. However, given the past performance of the Iraqi army, it seems likely that ~~Iran eventually will succeed in accomplishing its military objectives.~~

US Interests

- To deny Iran to the Soviet Union and keep open the possibility of US rapprochement with Iran.
- To protect moderate Arab states from overt or covert Iranian aggression and protect US economic interests (including oil access) in the region.
- To prevent a strengthening of Iraqi ties with the Soviet Union or the "capture" of Baghdad by Tehran or Damascus.

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-- To demonstrate the reliability and value of the US as an ally and the cynicism of the Soviet Union.

US Objectives

Political. Our principal objective is to help bring an end to the war before Iran can assume hegemony in the region and undermines our vital interests. Simultaneously, we must act to sustain and strengthen the confidence of Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states in the US without generating the perpetual enmity of the Iranians or moving them closer to the Soviets.

Military. Military instruments must be used carefully to support our short-term needs without jeopardizing long-term strategic requirements. First, US military actions should deter direct Iranian aggression against friendly states without constituting a provocative and counterproductive direct threat to Iran. Second, our military posture should convince our friends that they will not be forced to choose Iranian subversion or Soviet guarantees, perhaps offered by surrogates like Syria. Finally, we should use this situation as an opportunity to foster enhanced strategic cooperation with key states.

Economic. We must work with allies and friends to prevent the widening of the war in a manner that would disrupt Gulf oil supplies and/or international financial markets.

US Policy

Our response to an Iranian invasion will significantly influence perceptions of American commitment and resolve. Doubts about the US, stemming back to our failure to help the Shah, will be enhanced or eroded, as will the value of strong association with the US. If we are to convince the Saudis, in particular, that the benefits of associating with us outweigh the costs, we must not be perceived as wanting in our response. To prove our seriousness, we must take steps that clearly demonstrate our readiness and will to help defend our friends. This should be done in a manner that does not enflame the Iranians or push them into the Soviet orbit and that takes careful account of the political sensitivities of our friends. In this vein, we should not force measures on these states that are more overt than they feel the traffic will bear. But neither should we seem reluctant to respond nor willing only to take minimal measures. We must also bear in mind that the perception in the Arab world that we have colluded with Israel in Lebanon has further weakened our credibility. This may make some Arab leaders less inclined to turn to us for help in view of the internal threats to their regimes.

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If you approve, the following measures would position us to act quickly to respond to requests from our friends in the area for assistance in the face of Iranian threats:

1. A Presidential letter to King Fahd, perhaps carried by a Special Emissary, that describes our concerns and states out readiness to cooperate in the defense of the kingdom.
2. Messages to Jordan, Egypt, the Peninsula states, and Pakistan expressing support and suggesting immediate consultations on the threat.
3. Public statements opposing acquisition of territory by force and raising the perception of the gravity of the situation.
4. Develop Congressional briefings that make clear the character of US interests in the region, threats to those interests, and feasible courses of action that the US may take to protect American interests.
5. Seek visible joint military exercises or demonstrations with Oman and/or Jordan and Saudi Arabia. Specifically, propose a bilateral air defense exercise with Saudi Arabia involving the deployment of a squadron of F-15s and/or an air defense HAWK battalion.
6. Move rapidly to establish the combined contingency planning group with the Saudis which is already approved in principle.
7. Develop specific combined contingency plans for the deployment of US aircraft and air defense units to Saudi Arabia in order to facilitate such a deployment if the Saudis request it.
8. Initiate consultation to see whether more frequent exchange of intelligence between appropriate services of both countries' armed forces, such as between MIDEASTFOR ships and units of Royal Saudi Navy, are desirable.
9. Consider providing airlift and logistic support for any Jordanian and/or Egyptian deployments to Gulf states.
10. Initiate with our allies an UNSC resolution calling for cease-fire, withdrawal, negotiations, and war relief measures.
11. Contingency press guidance at Tab A.

RECOMMENDATION

That you approve the above-listed measures.

Approve _____

Disapprove _____

CONFIDENTIALCONTINGENCY PRESS GUIDANCE

The United States Government has and will maintain a policy of neutrality in the war between Iran and Iraq. We believe a political solution to the war must be sought which is based on respect for the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of both states. The United States will support all efforts to bring about a cessation of hostilities and a negotiated end to the conflict. Because of our vital interests and responsibilities in the Gulf area, the United States is prepared in concert with the states of the area, to take all appropriate measures to support the security of friendly states.

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